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ABSTRACT

The Xinachtli Project, implemented by Chicano activists in Phoenix (Arizona) and El Paso (Texas), addresses the loss of ancestral culture by public school students of Mexican ancestry. The project teaches indigenous Mexican culture to students and their teachers through a series of presentations and lectures on Aztec dance, mathematics, language, and symbols. A 3-day Xinachtli program was attended by 92 middle-school students, aged 12-15. The majority were Chicana and Chicano and had had little previous exposure to education on indigenous Mexican culture. Before and 3 weeks after the program, students completed a questionnaire covering cultural knowledge, self-esteem, goals, reading preferences, and attitudes toward reading. Results indicate that the project succeeded in enhancing student reading preferences (toward culturally related materials), attitudes toward reading, and cultural knowledge. Student responses to an informal essay question favored the program and, in some cases, projected its value in a future context. In a separate survey, Phoenix teachers felt that the content conveyed by the Xinachtli Project improved student self-esteem and was also useful as a resource for multicultural education in their schools. (SV)

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INDIGENOUS MEXICAN CULTURE AND CHICANA/O EDUCATION

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Abstract

The effect of exposure to an indigenous cultural program, the Xinachtli Project, upon Chicana and Chicano adolescents is analyzed through a quasi-experiment. The cultural program is based on facets of indigenous Mexican culture such as dance, language, and mathematics. Adolescent subjects are administered a pretest and post-test measuring cultural interest and knowledge. Mean score differences are examined to explain treatment effects upon reading preferences, cultural knowledge, self-esteem, and self-concept. Informal narratives by the students assist in interpreting the effects of the treatment. Exposure to ancestral-indigenous culture enhances cultural knowledge and reading preferences among Chicana and Chicano adolescents. Teachers who are sensitized to the importance of ancestral culture of students are key mediums for eliciting favorable responses from the students.

Introduction

Indigenous groups throughout the country face the irony of acknowledging an explorer whose accidental discovery was a precursor to the demise of millions of the indigenous peoples of the Americas (Zinn, 1980). Columbus' naming of Native-Americans as "Indians" was a mistake because he assumed to have met inhabitants of the West Indies. This marks the beginning of 500 years of misunderstanding and conflict between the Mesoamerican and European cultures. One of the groups most deeply affected by European conquest is the indigenous Mexican and their descendants. The indigenous Mexican had flourished on the North American continent among Mesoamerican culture. Through subsequent disease, enslavement, political domination, and religious persecution, the original culture of the indigenous Mexican went underground or merged with Euro-religious practices. During the Spanish conquest of Mexico, Mesoamerican culture was nearly eradicated. Traditional ceremonies and beliefs could not be practiced under the oppressive reign of Spain. The indigenous peoples who chose to continue practicing their traditional culture had to do so apart from the new institutions of religion and government being established by Spain. Indigenous Mexicans could select the alternative of merging with these new practices or face persecution in practicing traditional beliefs. An example of this merging can still be seen today in the similarity between the Aztec Dance and the Matachine Dance that honors the Catholic Church.

The suppression of original Mesoamerican culture can be viewed as a deficit impacting the self-concept of present day Chicanas and Chicanos. The stigma of being associated with Native-American culture is ingrained into the majority of the Chicana and Chicano belief systems. The desire for the Chicana and Chicano to deny their ancestral culture prevails in their attempt to assimilate into the mainstream society of the United States (Hernández, 1973), yet their belief systems are very similar to those of the Native-American (Batalla, 1990).

This process of assimilation and subsequent cultural loss is being alleviated through a reflective process on the part of the Chicano people. This reflection has manifested itself in recent times by indigenous groups, such as the Chicana and Chicano, questioning and reassessing

the Columbus Quincentennary Celebration. However, there has been a tradition of neglect pertaining to the culture of Chicana and Chicano students within the public education system (Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991). The public education system has created a vacuum for the Chicana and Chicano in understanding their ancestral culture by neglecting appropriate instruction in that area for teachers and students.

A strong understanding of ancestral culture, relating this culture to the present day, and projecting this understanding to the future is an important characteristic attributed to success in school (Caplan, Choy & Whitmore, 1992). Asian students who have maintained their ancestral culture have succeeded academically and even surpassed their more affluent peers. Educational research that investigates the importance of culture in Asian students has increased, but how are those issues related to the culture of the Chicana and Chicano? This study is driven by the relationship of ancestral culture and its efficacy as an impetus for enhancing academic achievement among students. The indigenous Mexican culture has not evolved beyond 1521 because subsequent conquests impeded that evolution. The cultures of conquering countries, such as Spain, France, and United States, contributed to the "mestizaje," or a mixing of blood, with the indigenous Mexican. The loss of ancestral culture by Chicana and Chicano students is a variable that affects their interaction with society, particularly the ability to succeed in school. Their skin color, their food, their symbols are grounded in this culture, yet because they lack knowledge of ancestral culture they are unable to express, much less, celebrate it. Though other variables, predominantly family support, influence student success in school (Caplan et al., 1992), sensitization to original culture is a viable facet for enforcement enhancing student ability to succeed at school. However, access to information about indigenous culture has been mostly limited to community advocacy groups from the Chicano movement, who emphasize this indigenous past and have distanced themselves from their Euro-American components (Griswold Del Castillo, 1990).

Distrust toward the professional is pervasive throughout society (Schön, 1983). The failure of the public school system to educate minorities has led to a resurgence of community

support groups to fulfill the responsibility of educating minority youth. Community support groups are successful in addressing social and educational problems affecting at-risk youth and minorities (Nettles, 1991). The success of these alternative groups has led to a clash with the very public school systems they chose to support (Meier, 1991). These groups are often composed of average citizens without university degrees or teaching certificates. Community support groups are showing an increase of socially concerned students as volunteers (Serow, 1991). These groups deal with problems unresolved by the social institutions established to serve the community and unfulfilled by the educational system that is expected by the community to adjust itself to these problems. These problems include the rise in gang violence, drug abuse, AIDS awareness, and education. The nature of community support groups puts them at odds with established bureaucracies and the professionals that work within them because the success of these alternative groups in resolving problems could result in the disenfranchisement of established institutions that were created by the majority culture to deal with these issues.

Background of the Xinachtli Project

The Xinachtli Project, run by Chicano activists in Phoenix, Arizona, and El Paso, Texas, addresses the loss of ancestral culture by public school students of Mexican ancestry. The term "Xinachtli" is a Náhuatl word that means "seed," and translated within this context describes the seed of culture being nurtured to grow. The Xinachtli Project teaches indigenous Mexican culture through a series of presentations and lectures. The program makes Chicana and Chicano students aware of the richness of their ancestral past by drawing from them experiences and oral language that is directly related to Mesoamerican culture.

One of the ways the Xinachtli Project sensitizes the student to their strong link with their ancestral past is through their everyday language. Ownership of the Mesoamerican culture is prevalent among Chicana and Chicano adolescents and is instilled in their psyche (Forbes, 1987). This ownership of the culture manifests itself through the use of Náhuatl words such as "ejote, tomate, zacate, and zoquete" to describe green beans, tomato, grass, and mud. Southwest Spanish

and special codes of that language such as Caló jargon has been influenced by Indian languages (Ornstein-Galicia, 1988).

Náhuatl is the ancient language of the Aztecs. Although other etymological influences upon Cálo exist, such as Spanish-Gypsy Cálo (Reyes, 1988), investigation into Náhuatl influence is valid for interpreting cognizance of ancestral culture by the Chicana and Chicano student. This recognition of ancestral culture is a medium for eliciting cultural pride and concomitantly enhancing self-concept. Students reflect upon words that have a Náhuatl etymology through the dialogue that is created. The Xinachtli Project engages the student in reflection about their ancestral culture once the student recognizes ownership of the culture. The recognition of cultural symbols is also important in eliciting student ownership of the culture. Symbols that are universally familiar to Chicana and Chicano students include the flag of Mexico, which has an Aztec symbol central to the tricolor. The symbol of the eagle atop a cactus describes the origin of what is today Mexico City.

The Aztec calendar is another easily recognizable symbol for the students and is one of the major features of the Xinachtli presentation. The calendar is demystified during the lecture when students are taught how to read it. The various symbols on the calendar, particularly the twenty day-year glyphs in one of the central rings, are explained. Since the Aztec calendar utilizes the Mesoamerican system of mathematics, the calendar becomes a medium for teaching that particular number system. So what was once thought of as an aesthetic icon representative of Mexico becomes a practical tool for constructing and comprehending reality. The demystification of the calendar for the student allows her or him to have the ability to decipher and implement a prominent symbol of their culture.

One of the important criteria for instruction in the Xinachtli Project is the ability to understand and use these symbols of culture. Carlos Aceves, one of the Xinachtli Project directors, explains with an analogy:

> "You can think of the symbols as being like a car. You can give a car to a person, but if you don't teach them how to drive it then it's useless. The symbols are only valid for the student when they learn how to use them."

The internalization of the symbols of indigenous Mexican culture is an important aspect of the Xinachtli Project, and throughout the presentation students are taught the meaning behind the ancestral symbolism.

Tupac Enrique, also one of the project directors, believes that it is the teachers who also play a critical role in allowing the students to internalize the instruction of the Xinachtli Project. Since ESL and bilingual education teachers frequently receive inadequate preparation for their positions (García, 1986), the Xinachtli Project becomes an important source of cultural information when the teachers participate along with their class. Once the teachers internalize the information, they can reinforce it in their classroom and use the symbols along with their students to discern meaning from daily activities. By using these ancestral symbols in their lives, a ceremonial perspective is reintroduced to the student.

There is a ceremonial quality to the Xinachtli Project's presentation, especially in the Aztec dance segment. The use of symbols is an integral part of any ceremony. School gatherings and ceremonies are often administrative and lack ethnic diversity. The ability for students to express themselves culturally is lacking from traditional school ceremonies (Deal, 1990). Most often, school ceremonies are oriented around the practices and beliefs of the majority culture and are Euro-centric. This can be examined through a Halloween costume dance, as opposed to recognition of El Día de Los Muertos, or a Christmas play with a nativity scene, as opposed to Kwaanzan, the African practice of exchanging gifts. The ceremonies and beliefs of the majority culture permeate the belief systems of most ethnic groups that are dominated by a majority culture, and not assimilating into those beliefs will alienate nonparticipants (Giroux, 1990).

The Xinachtli Project's innovation is that it identifies the ancestral beliefs and symbols of Chicana and Chicano students and then continues to elicit ownership of that culture from the students. Once students begin to internalize their ancestral culture, they can begin to explore further complex features of indigenous Mexican culture and project that understanding and its relevance to the present and the future.

Through this study we can further understand the implications and effects of teaching and awakening student knowledge of ancestral culture. This study will seek to measure the use of the Xinachtli Project to determine its viability and effectiveness for enhancing the education of Chicana and Chicano adolescents. Currently, there is very little research on the topic although in a recent issue of Educational Researcher (1992), Henry A. Giroux supports investigation of the "language of remembrance" that is an ideological principle behind this study and deserves to be quoted at length:

> "...educational leaders need to be skilled in the language of remembrance. Remembrance rejects knowledge as merely an inheritance, with transmission as its only form of practice. Remembrance sees knowledge as a social and historical construction that is always the object of struggle. It is not preoccupied with the ordinary but with what is distinctive and extraordinary. It is concerned not with societies that are quiet, that reduce learning to reverence, procedure and whispers, but with forms of public life that are noisy, that are engaged in dialogue and vociferous speech. In this view, truth is not contained solely in practice; it is also part of the world of recollections, historical memory, and the tales and stories of those who have established a well-known legacy of democratic struggle and who have too often been silenced, excluded, or marginalized."

The emancipatory paradigm that is offered by Giroux captures the gist of what the Xinachtli Project is all about. By seeking to expand our knowledge of what is already known, or remembered, we can create a foundation whereby subsequent pursuits can be achieved by the Chicana and Chicano students without reservations about the substance of their foundation. By correctly addressing the inter-cultural issues of Chicana and Chicano education, there can be a dialogue of acceptance that will establish meaning and truth.

Description of the Study

Subjects

The subjects for this quasi-experiment are 92 middle-school students living in a Southwestern suburb. The subjects ranged in ages 12 to 15 years and were either in the seventh or the eighth grade. The majority of the middle-school children are Chicana and Chicano and were enrolled in either a reading or a Spanish language class. The subjects had received little or no exposure to indigenous Mexican culture prior to the treatment. Whatever cultural values they had formulated about indigenous Mexican culture prior to the study had to have been derived from prior knowledge of the culture.

The subjects were not specifically screened or tested to qualify for participation in the study and were drawn as a sample of the general population. According to a recent campus profile (YISD, 90), the ethnic composition of the school is 63% Latino, 33% Anglo, and 3% African-American. The ethnic and gender composition of the subjects approximates that of the middle-school.

There were 92 subjects that took the pretest, and 81 subjects who tool the post-test. The reduction in subjects taking the post-test was due to transfers, withdrawals, and one death. The transfer of a new student into or out of the subject group may have had a minimal effect upon the scores derived from the study. Significant results were attained from certain key variables that the study sought to examine, and the subject groups' gender differences remained nearly equal when these changes occurred, thus the degree that scores were affected by changes in the subject group would not be severe.

Instrumentation

For the pretest and post-test portion of the study, subjects were administered the Eastwood Middle-School Cultural Interest Inventory that was created exclusively for the study. The interest inventory used informal narratives from past student journals as a sounding board to create questions that would describe the influence of the treatment upon the students. The instrument consists of 22 questions examining student's cultural knowledge, self-esteem, goals, reading preferences, and attitudes toward reading. Both the pretest and the post-test were administered by the teacher during a class session. The pretest was administered about a week before the treatment, and the post-test was administered three weeks after the treatment.

There were also informal essay response questions that were given to the students as part of a journal assignment. These written responses were not quantitatively measured, but they do provide an insightful description of the program's effects upon the students.

Treatment

The treatment entailed two days of lecture and one day of dance presentation. The lectures and dance were conducted by Mr. Tupac Enrique from Phoenix, Arizona. The lectures

and presentation were conducted in the school auditorium. Students were let out from their regular classrooms to the auditorium for those three days.

Upon arrival, students were distributed a five-page handout that contains pictures depicting the Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuacán, the central symbol of the Aztec calendar, a graphic describing the year count for the Aztec calendar, and a copy of the Codex Mendoza. The handout contained no readable text other than the picture glyphs. An overhead projector was used to elaborate upon and describe the pictures in the handouts.

During the first part of the lecture, Mr. Tupac Enrique elicited ownership of the culture from students by describing everyday words and slang that have an etymological relationship to the Náhuatl language of Mesoamerican culture. These include words that have even transferred and evolved into modern English such as coyote, chocolate, tomato, maize, and avocado (Siméon, 1988). Some other words that are common to Chicanas and Chicanos include chile, coyote, itzcuintli, and the use of the idioms "itito" and "itote" to describe something big or small. Students are made aware of the fact that the Náhuatl language exists in their present schema although they may not be consciously aware of this. This establishes their ownership of the culture for the Chicana and Chicano and engages the students of a different ethnic background, such as Anglo or African-American, into an understanding of the Aztec culture.

The lectures continue on to describe the Aztec calendar system. How to read the date and year through the Aztec calendar is discussed after the students are familiarized with the various glyphs and the Mesoamerican system of counting. The Aztec calendar integrates a glyph medium of mathematics and this is taught concomitantly with the twenty-day glyphs that are central to the calendar. This process demystifies the calendar from being merely an aesthetic symbol of Mexican culture into a readable, practical tool for measuring time and place. Throughout the lectures, questions and discussions are elicited to assist in the students' understanding.

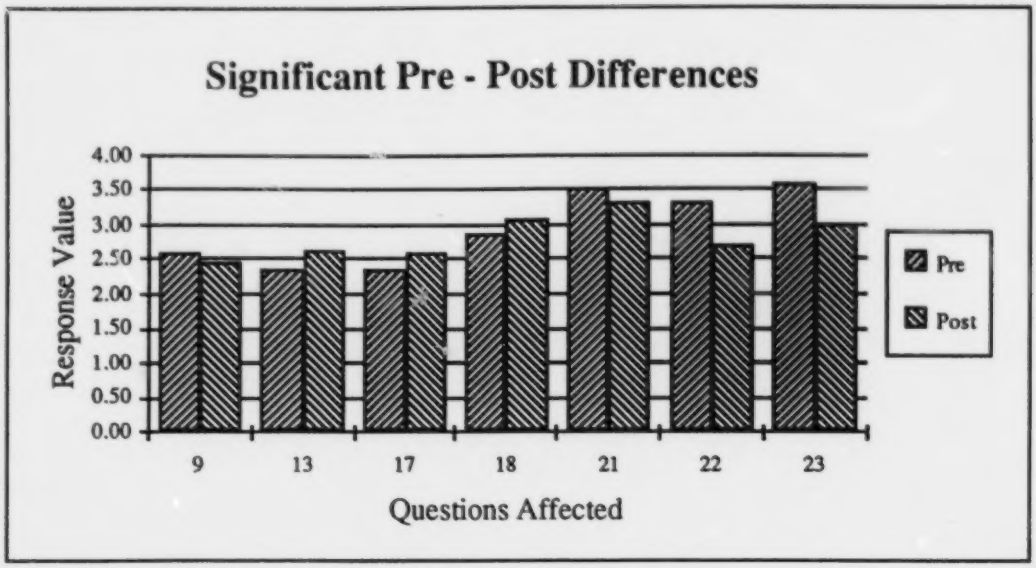
On the third day, students are shown a demonstration of Aztec dance and are allowed to participate. The dance presentations are conducted in a traditional ceremonial manner. At the beginning of the dance, a conch shell is blown to the four directions. The conch shell reverently

invokes the spirit of the dance. The conch is also blown to signal the end of the dance. Students volunteer to dance and are led through various steps following a beat on a drum. Throughout the dance, copal incense is burned in a ceramic vessel, and the air in the auditorium has an odor much like a forest. "Ayoyotes," the traditional leg garment for the Aztec dancer, are used in the dance. These made a sound like cascading water during the dance. By using these ceremonial objects, the four elements integral to indigenous Mexican culture manifest themselves. These are fire, air, water, and earth. The dance is a reflective group activity that reinforces the treatment through physical application. This is considered to be one of the important parts of the Xinachtli Project's presentation because the student crosses over from being an observer into a participant.

Another important facet of the presentation, is how the teachers are influenced during the presentation. The traditional symbols of indigenous Mexican and the dance became the subject of discussion among the students and teachers. Frequently, these discussions were directed at both the presenter and the teachers. The teachers are encouraged to participate actively in the presentation because they are the ones who will be reinforcing the content that is taught. This reinforcement of the treatment was also enhanced by Mr. Tupac Enrique visiting and speaking to individual classrooms during his stay at the middle-school.

Results

A comparison between pretest and post-test means of the culture interest inventory yielded few significant differences between scores. Those questions which showed significant differences between means will be examined by gender. A difference between means of .15 or more was considered to be significant (<.05). The data affirmed that the Xinachtli Project succeeded in influencing student reading preferences, attitudes toward reading, and cultural knowledge, but scores examining self-concept and self-esteem yielded no significant differences.



Cultural knowledge definitely increased and elicited interest on the part of the students to learn more about indigenous Mexican culture. During the pretest students felt very comfortable with what they had been taught about their ancestral culture, yet after the treatment students indicated that they knew less about their culture. Although the difference between the pretest and post-tests was not significant (.14), it may indicate that some students came to the realization that they knew less about their culture after prior knowledge was exposed to extensive cultural information. This realization of lack of cultural knowledge by some of the students was offset by the scores that indicated more familiarity with the culture after the treatment. However, this deficiency in cultural knowledge was also supported by a decrease (.26) for question 13 that asked if the schools had done a good job teaching culture. Again, this decrease supported the indication that cultural instruction was inadequate after being exposed to a culturally rich program such as the Xinachtli Project.

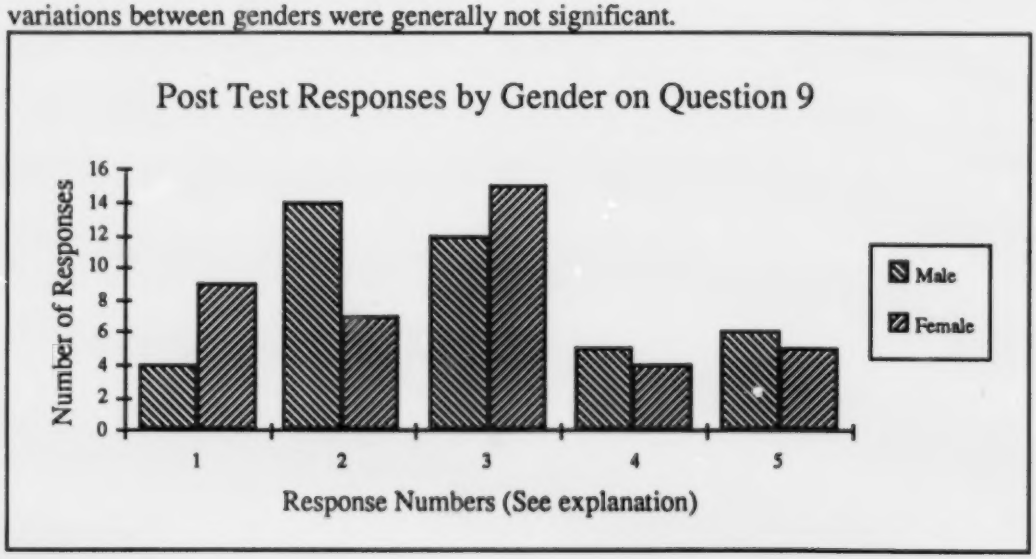
Familiarity for the culture was evident in a gain (.17) for students who recognized the Náhuatl language. The highest gains of the interest inventory occurred in questions 22 and 23 when the students responded to an increase in familiarity with the Aztec Calendar (.61) and Aztec Dance (.59).

On question 17, student belief that cultural knowledge makes you a better person showed an increase (.25). Students also indicated that they desired to learn more about Aztec culture, and a significant difference on question 18 between the pretest and post-test means (.24) indicated that students believed this knowledge to be important. Please view Appendix B for a table showing the pre and post-test differences for all questions.

In the narrative responses, pretest and post-test differences indicated a definite influence by the treatment upon reading preferences and attitudes toward reading. Students indicated that they would like to read more about Aztecs, Indians, Mayas, Mexican history, Mexican heroes, the Mexican Revolution, Pancho Villa, and stories about other cultures. There also were slight gains (.16) for students being more inclined to read books about their culture and feeling that this type of reading is important (.07).

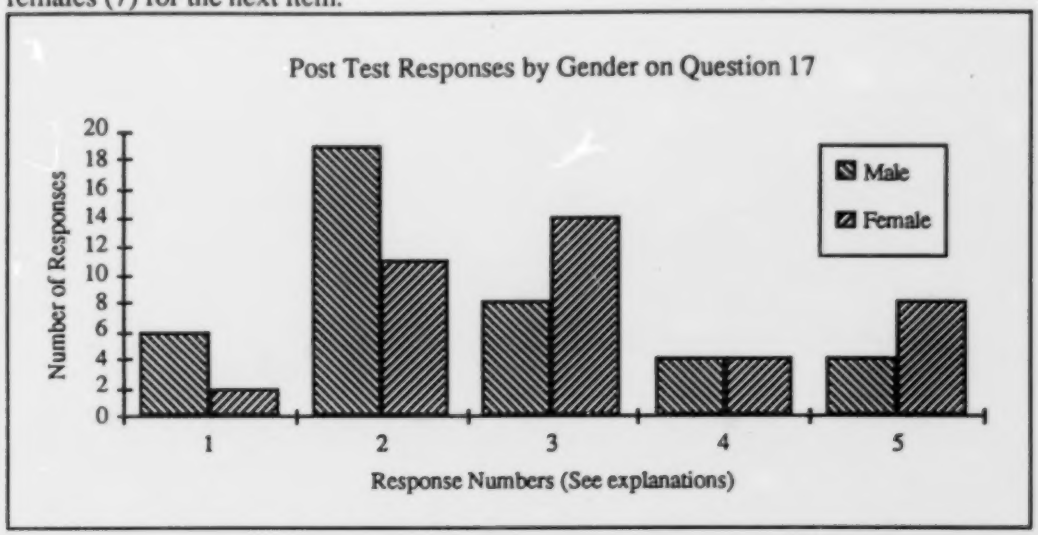
Gender Analysis of Significant Results

A gender analysis of post-test questions that showed the most significant gain gave some insight on how subjects responded (see Appendix B for complete tables). These response variations between genders were generally not significant.



On question nine "Would you like reading more if you could read books about your culture," the majority of the students (27) answered "No, not very much." The gender differences were not significant for that item, but on a previous item, more females (9) were likely to answer

"Yes, very much" than males (4). Twice as many males (14) answered "Yes, somewhat" than females (7) for the next item.



Post test question 17, which asks if cultural knowledge makes you a better person, had the most significant differences in gender. Males (25) were far more likely to answer "Yes, very much" or "Yes, somewhat" than females (13). Females in the sample were more likely to indicate that cultural knowledge would not make you a better person.

Post-test questions 18, 22, and 23 showed significant gains in means between pre and post-tests, but they maintained a somewhat consistent balance between gender.

Essay Responses

An informal essay question that was administered separately from the interest inventory gives some insight as to the effects of the treatment. All narrative responses favored the Xinachtli Project's presentation, and some projected its value in a future context. Subjects responded:

> "We still have Aztec traditions, and I think they will never end."
> "Maybe the people that are not Aztec may like to know about the culture and the Aztecs because (sic) it is very interesting. They have alot of interesting things."

One student looked forward to sharing new knowledge about the Aztec calendar with other students and teachers in high school:

> "It will be really nice to know how to use the Aztec calendar because in high school if a teacher whants (sic) you to do a special (report, sic) you could show them how to use the Aztec calendar."

Some students contrasted the tranquillity reflected in the ancestral past with the present:

> "In the past they didn't have a good T.V. or VCR, but they use to live in peace and now that we have everything we are always fighting."

> "Before everything people (Aztecs, sic) did wasn't bad to them. Everything would be OK. Nowadays, the world is always wild Of course it was wild before, but not as much as now."

One student made this prediction about current education trends:

> "If we continue like this (sic) ways, like we are not learning about the Aztec culture, (then, sic) I think the Aztec culture is going to disappear."

Another student who responded favorably to the program indicated that it would be misinterpreted by people unrelated to indigenous Mexican ancestry:

> "The future of the Aztec culture is that people won't understand it and the Aztecs will."

After reading several of the students journals over the course of several months, many of the students indicated a reverance for the ancestral aspects of their identity - and they recalled the Xinachtli presentation with pride and a mixed sense of conflict about how to situate their ancestral culture/knowledge in the present day.

Discussion

Although there are some significant gains for familiarity with the culture, why were not more significant gains recorded in other areas? There are several reasons why this may be. Primarily, the instrument used to measure the effects of the treatment is content oriented and the Xinachtli Project is mostly symbol oriented. The instrument would have been more accurate in recording gains if it would have measured the knowledge and use of symbols such as the Aztec calendar and the Mesoamerican pyramid which are emphasized in the cultural program.

Another reason why the effects of the Xinachtli Project are not immediately measurable is because the knowledge conveyed by the program may not be immediately measurable. The students would need to take time to reassess their culture and for the innovation to take hold. For example, when a student who had received the treatment views a picture of an Aztec calendar imprinted on a restaurant menu, she could reflect upon the fact that the symbol represents something and is not merely an aesthetic or superficial symbol of culture. Cultural value could be

strengthened by the treatment, but this maybe difficult to quantitatively measure so soon after the treatment.

The Xinachtli Project makes accessible the symbols of indigenous Mexican culture whereas before the symbols of the culture were frozen in the student's schema and were impediments to their social and cognitive development. These symbols are considered frozen since they are of no use to the student, and there is little or no knowledge of the practical and scientific applications of the symbols. Once demystified, these symbols are able to act upon the students as powerful archetypes that become guide posts for activities requiring positive self-esteem and a sense of place within the world (Jung, 1964).

Establishing a place within the world is one of the important organizing features of the Xinachtli Project. Students are given a path to define their sense of place and time within their reality. The indigenous philosophy of Mesoamerican culture constructs reality by establishing an orientation on the earth. This orientation accounts for physical direction and time.

Adolescents are in a constant state of physical, social, and psychological change. For a Chicana or Chicano adolescent to have a symbolic ballast, such as an Aztec calendar, pyramid, or glyph, would relieve some of the stress associated with this change. Ethnic identity can be a complex problem for Chicana and Chicano adolescents. They may choose to deny their indigenous background because of the stigma associated with it (Paredes, 1991). They may wish to embrace the material plenitude of the majority culture. An understanding of the symbolism associated with ethnic identity is important in developing a foundation for dealing with more complex issues that are encountered as we evolve in our society.

Mesoamerican culture remains embedded in the Chicana and Chicano schema through powerful symbols such as the Aztec calendar, corn, death, Matachines (Aztec dance acknowledging Catholicism), and the Virgin de Guadalupe (representative of Mother Earth/Tonantzín). These symbols are reinforced by social interactions such as the Aztec calendar being used to market and promote ideas, Matachines during saints' days and the Virgin de Guadalupe festivals, Día de Los Muertos, and corn products used in daily diets. At the same time,

cultural prejudices from within and outside the community sometimes indicate that "Indian things" are inferior. Thus these symbols become stumbling blocks when a Chicana or Chicano attempt to gain self-esteem or have a sense of place and belonging in history and present-day society. Being able to project knowledge of ancestral culture to the present and future is attributed as a factor for student academic success in school (Caplan, et. al. 1992; Hess, Chih-Mei, & McDermott, 1987).

What the Xinachtli Project does is make these symbols come alive. The Xinachtli Project made realistic and scientific descriptions of indigenous Mexican culture, such as how the pyramid of Teotihuacán is aligned to the Pleiades star cluster and the linear precision of the Aztec calendar to measure the solar year. These explanations all gave meaning to the universal quest of human-beings to search for their time and place upon the earth. Since these descriptions originated in the ancestral past of the Chicana and Chicano, this makes them a valid source of pride for the students and a medium for understanding among students of another ethnic background. The Xinachtli Project taps into "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1992) that are inherent to Chicanas and Chicanos and creates a viable and nurturing dialogue between the teacher and the student. This dialogue can extend itself into the community to include cultural elements in the community which can contribute to the construction of meaning in the classroom. This dialogue can be cross-cultural and show the universal search for truth by all ethnic groups.

Demographic projections indicate a large increase of Latino students. The majority of those students are of a Mexican background. Existing teacher education programs are struggling to compensate for this student increase. Teachers that are trained to fill positions in ESL and bilingual education programs are frequently inadequately prepared. This is partly because the education of language minorities is being viewed as a temporary curriculum (García, 1986). The demographics indicate that the increase in the Chicana and Chicano population is not temporary and will most likely continue to increase. Established institutions that have been dominated by the majority culture may feel this demographic shift as an encroachment upon established policies structured by the majority culture (Giroux, 1990, 1988).

Public school curriculum should respond to the demographic changes in the ethnic composition of students. The introduction of multicultural curriculum is a progressive step toward coping with these shifting demographics although this curriculum change has been met with resistance (Sleeter, 1989). Administrators and teachers need to multiply their perceptions of students instead of being divisive or restrictive in their assessment of needs for ethnically unique students. If schools are indeed nurturing institutions, then equal weight must be given to the cultural instruction of students who do not belong to the majority culture. This instruction needs to move beyond the treatment of language as culture. Teaching language to a student does not necessarily mean that they are receiving cultural knowledge. Educational curriculum that emphasizes language instruction as a component of culture falls short of the substance necessary to enrich and enlighten the students who does not pertain to the majority culture. There is a need for students and teachers to practice conscientização (Freire, 90), or critical action used to counter oppressive elements of society. Students and teachers need to learn to become critical of their culture if they are to be emancipated by it. The Xinachtli Project empowers Chicanas and Chicanos to discern key elements of indigenous Mexican culture through symbols that had before been an enigma. Once the meanings behind these identifying symbols of culture become understood, the culture becomes valuable. This enriched perception of culture is a foundation for enhancing the education and empowerment of individuals and entire ethnic groups. Culture and its perceptions are not static but are in a constant state of change. New applications of ancestral knowledge must be creatively constructed by the classroom. An example would be constructing a pyramid to understand the solstices and equinoxes of the planet. Projecting ancestral knowledge in new directions is only confined by the boundaries of the imagination that is nurtured in the classroom.

Implementing a reflective pedagogy to continuously assess and reassess the varying needs of students would benefit all ethnic groups by allowing them to mutually understand each others differences (Godina, 1991). Ideally, this would create an environment that is both positive and inquisitive for the student. Minority students already utilize a form of reflection in negative

reassessment of the educational process that is structured by the majority culture. McDermott (1974) perceives this as an achievement of pariah status by minority students who select to participate in a subculture that circumvents instruction by the minority culture. The minority students attainment of pariah status is reinforced by the negative expectations of the majority culture. Pariah status can be seen as viable reflective alternative on the part of the minority student. If the student cannot fit into the educational framework imposed by the majority culture, the student will reassess their situation and select to fit into the subculture of school failure and achieve status in that context.

Cross-cultural studies have indicated that patterns of recall are the same for ethnically diverse students (Mandler, Scribner, Cole, and DeForest, 1980). However, curriculum needs to move beyond simple recall of cultural knowledge and allow members of varying cultures to internalize and implement the symbols that are important and unique to their particular ethnic group. Symbols of culture are not exclusive to any particular culture. Symbols of culture, such as the Mesoamerican pyramid and the Irish four-leaf clover, can be shared between ethnic groups equally to evoke a mutual understanding between diverse groups. Encouraging reflection in students and teachers to allow them to critically discover and share the symbols of culture would nurture an environment that would be exclusive of racial divisions. Projecting this understanding toward the future is a critical step in this evolution. In this manner, the traditional cycle of oppression that is still felt by minority cultures, who continue to be subjugated and marginalized throughout the world, may be assuaged.

As society evolves, culture and ethnic diversity needs to be allowed to evolve with it. By enhancing understanding between minority and majority cultures, the resources that are offered by both cultures can be used to their optimum advantage. Investigations into ancestral culture are a valid step toward understanding the essence of our existence. Students learning of those ancestral traditions and symbols would promote healthy manifestations of archetypes that would allow them to derive meaning from their description of reality and succeed beyond the classroom.

Teachers, as always, are the facilitators for students accessing their culture. The teachers understanding and ability to multiply perception of ethnic groups is a cornerstone for effective multicultural education. In a recent survey by the Phoenix Union High School District (1992), teachers felt that the content conveyed by the Xinachtli Project is valuable for improving student self-esteem. The Xinachtli Project stands as a cultural- education model that offers solutions for teachers in meeting the needs of culturally diverse students. This is one of the reasons why the program is successful and is in high demand in Phoenix, Arizona.

In the future, it is important to explore efficient ways of disseminating this knowledge and the emancipatory ideology that embodies it. As teachers and students begin to diversify and reflect their understanding of their world and themselves, it is hoped that the established order of education redefines itself into one that embraces diversity within individuals and the world. The Xinachtli Project constructs a reality that is relevant to the cultural identity of human beings as we continue to evolve and to reach higher goals once those needs have been fulfilled.

What also needs to be contended with in the future will be the movement toward a Mesocentric curriculum that may or may not be at odds with the perception of Chicana/o popular culture. This problem is similar to what is happening within the African American community and the tensions being felt between the Afrocentric movement and the tensions between Black popular culture. What is most important about instruction with indigenous Mexican culture is the positive sense of pride that is instilled in the students where perhaps none has been there before. The potential for engagmg the Chicana/o student in academic tasks using indigenous Mexican culture as a vehicle is limitless in its scope and merits further investigation for the impact it may have for curbing school drop-out.

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